Collyrium.

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A SERMON OF Destructive Ignorance, AND Saving Knowledge.

Preached in *Christ-Church, Dublin, August* 4. 1672.

And Published at the importunity of divers, who thought it might tend to disabuse many well-meaning people.

By *Edw. Wetenhall*, B. D. Prebendary of St. *Peters Exon.*

LONDON,
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To the most Reverend Father in God,

MICHAEL

Lord Archbishop of *Dublin*,

AND

Lord Chancellor of the Kingdom of

IRELAND.

May it please your Grace,

DIvers of my Friends, *Auditors of this Sermon, have taken occasion to be so troublesome to me for it, that I saw no way to deliver my self from their displeasure, but by gratifying their importunity. The same Persons, as I understood, expresly professing when they should have a Copy they would make it publick, I resolved by making the Original such my self, to give both them and the World leave to take as much of it as they*

should list. Being now publick, it comes, as Duty directs it, an humble Present unto your Grace.

I am not at all solicitous as to its Entertainment in the World: being conscious to my self its Contents are wholly sober truth, with which if any should be angry, I am not yet satisfied that I ought to be concerned thereat, otherwise than to vouchsafe such persons my Pity, and the charity of my Prayers.

I only fear how your Grace may resent so bold a Dedication: But I have to say for my self, That, by the laxest Laws of Gratitude, I ought some publick testification of your Graces singular Sweetness and Constancy to me; That I had no fitter means of such testification than this, this being my first appearance in publick in the Kingdom of Ireland; *and besides it being not possible for me ever to present in so short a compass, more of my self and most intimate thoughts in a case of this nature, than I have done here: (Now First-fruits, and what is most sincerely Ours, use to come most acceptable Oblations.)*

That

The Epistle Dedicatory.

That the Experience, which I have had of your Graces favourable admission of Addresses far more troublesome than this, gave me confidence an attempt of Gratitude would not be ill taken.

In this confidence I forbear other Apologies, and most passionately pray to your Grace, amidst the great and various Vicissitudes of Humane affairs, such continuance of Health, Fortunes, and the Divine Blessing, that you may long live, what admirably you are, a glorious Precedent and Patron of all Learning, Worth and Virtue.

Your Graces

Dublin, Aug. 13. 1672.

most Humble Servant,

Edw. Wetenhall.

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Collyrium:

OR, A

SERMON

Of { *Deſtructive Ignorance,* / *Saving Knowledge.*

The Text.

Hoſ. 4. 6. *My people are deſtroyed for lack of knowledge.*

IT is a *Rule* as wholſom as general, and deriving immediately from the great deſign of all Sacred Scripture, (wherein whatſoever was recorded, the Apoſtle aſſures us to have been written *for our enſample* and inſtruction) that in thoſe ſeveral *parts* of it which were on *particular occaſions* were immediately addreſs'd to particular ages, peoples

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peoples or persons, we should all, as every subject is justly applicable, *accommodate* it each to our *present case* and *state*.

In *compliance* with which *Rule*, we shall not now concern our selves in a curious inquest into the Manners and Condition of this Jewish age, to whom our Prophet directs his speech, which (briefly) were sufficiently corrupt and deplorable; nor yet into the Originals of such their corruption and misery, (for those matters, though of good advantage to other purposes, than those we have proposed our selves at present, are notwithstanding such, for the not knowing whereof, we are secure enough *people* shall not be *destroyed*): But rather, taking the boldness to suppose, that what God here *complains* of these *Jews*, is without injury to the words or us, *accommodable* to our generation; and that even in this *knowing*, and (as presum'd) most Eagle-ey'd *age*, men amongst us do still *perish for lack of knowledge*, First, we will direct a scrutiny towards the discovering *what knowledge* that is, *for lack of* which people amongst us *are destroyed*: and, Secondly, endeavour some probable notices, whence those clouds arise which obscure our light, and what the *malignant causes* are of the present *destructive ignorance*: and, Lastly, with all due submission consult, what are the most hopefull remedies to be applyed in this case.

In pursuance of all which, we *promise*, what we say shall observe due *reverence* to all who have but

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any fair pretence to knowledge, much more to the truly Judicious: and as to those, whose good *opinions* of themselves are chiefly placed upon their own *confidence*, we *beseech* such, with all humility, and in the *spirit of meekness*, that they will be pleased to think some men in the World, who do little else but seek knowledge, may have some knowledge besides themselves; and therefore *impartially* to *consider*, whether what shall be said to them, carry not greater reason to convince them of the *lack* of *sound knowledge*, than what their own strong presumptions bear, to ensure them of their being already masters of it. No *wise* man but will be *thankfull* to be *shewed* his *error*: none therefore, who pretend to be such, may reasonably ill resent, what sincerity and good will speaks, to discover such mistakes, which there is much better evidence to pronounce pernicious, than to imagine tolerable.

And that it may be apparent, I intend not to *disgust* the age by a wild and indefinite imputation of ignorance to it, I shall with all candour own the knowledge in which our age may be confessed eminent; and therefore, *first*, bring in a *negative* answer to the proposed matter of enquiry, by saying, that poople are not destroyed at present,

1. For lack of a *Dogmatick knowledge*, amounting from intricate speculations, and fine notions, whether newly coined or retrieved from their deserved Graves. We have both in *Sacred matters* and *Civil*, conceits enough to spare the World, very sufficiently

ently to furniſh (I had almoſt ſaid to overlay) it, ſhould it continue to well nigh infinite ſucceſſions of ages. Beſides that we have been fertile of ſome *Opinions* which our days may *ſolely* boaſt of, there are few *old Hereſies*, which have not received amongſt us what *improvement* miſchievous wits could give them. And when the preſent *new-fashioned ſingularities* ſhall grow *ſtale*, we are not likely to want a freſh ſucceſſion, ſo long as *Spiritual illuminations* are ſo frequent, and every petite hit of wild imagination muſt be reputed an irradiation of the Holy Ghoſt, and a New Light from above.

Nor doth this eminency extend it ſelf only to *ſingle Opinions*; but, *ſecondly*, we are generally skilfull in Bodies and *Syſtems* of them; and thoſe *modell'd* and contrived into a dutifull ſubſerviency to the common *deſigns* of innovating *Factions*. Of all which new-framed *Schemes*, this be ſure is the conſtant Law, that they be *lax* enough, immediately to place, upon none or eaſie terms, all who *receive* them in an inamiſſible poſſeſſion of the Divine favour; and *rigid* enough on the other ſide to damn all, who are ſuch Infidels as to put a *difference* betwixt Saints and Confidents, or to think mens Chriſtianity ought to have other reaſon beſides their own preſumption.

And from theſe two ariſeth a *third* ſort of *precious knowledge*, in which we are of ſo high attainments, that all our predeceſſors whereſoever, have been but meer Punies and Chits in compariſon of us.

us. I know not by what name fitlier to ſtile it, than *Theological Lullianiſme*, or the art of ſenceleſs Divinity-Harangues: a fine verboſe talkative skill, by which men are able, without the trouble of any preparation, to deliver endleſs and unintelligible Myſteries, in the language of the Times, to *preach* and *pray moſt ſpiritually*, but in truth to amuſe and confound themſelves and their weak admirers with neither knows what.

I would not here be miſtaken, as if I did ſlight the *gifts* of *utterance* in a particular relation as well to *prayer*, as *preaching*, in *places* and *ſeaſons* where their uſe is meet: But I would fain have men rationally to conceive of them. For verily it is neceſſary, that as we put a difference between ſpeaking *ſpiritually* and ſpeaking *much*, ſo that we know even *ready* ſpeaking is a *habit* attained by the common-bleſſing of God upon mens *natural parts*, *induſtry* and *practice* in ſome meaſure improving them; and no ſuch Divine *inſpiration* as fancied: much leſs doth it conſtitute that which they call *Saving knowledge*, or neceſſarily proceed from a ſanctified heart. And that therefore the affectation of many and new-coined forms of ſpeech ought not to be ſo idolized, as being not at all an extraordinary gift; And further, in as much as nothing can be more notorious, than that through this one *Enthuſiaſtical* ſtrain of thus *preaching* and *praying*, a multitude of the moſt zealous pretenders to Religion are run clearly beyond all *reaſon* and *ſobriety*, and never now think they

edifie by any Sermon or Prayer, but when they have got a long headleſs piece of ſtuff together, made up of odd Phraſes and canting Allegories, out of which neither themſelves nor the wit of man can pick ſenſe. That only, I ſay, they judge themſelves to profit by, of which diſtinctly they can make nothing, and which is in truth only a new kind of empty noiſe, and train of riddles void of ſober ſignification.

I hope it will be obſerved my diſcourſe hitherto hath confin'd it ſelf to *Religious knowledge*: I could have given an account of other ſorts of knowledge for lack of which men are not likely to periſh. And I can ſcarcely forbear that marvellous skill and ſagacity we have all attained to in *Politicks*, ſcarce a *Foreman* of a Shop but is acquainted with all the reaſons of *State*, and publick neceſſities, and ſole expedients to ſalve them. And there are here and there diſpers'd little ſmart precocious ſuckers of the late *Republican Bramble*, who ſet up for Maſters in this Myſtery, and ſcrape together Intelligences from every Poſts News, and make up their reckonings, and thence inferr moſt neceſſary and fallible Aphoriſms, which they confidently diſperſe in all Companies, hoping for, what not rarely they find, *greedy admirers*, who giddily lick up all this their Spittle, and as giddily again diffuſe it. But I will paſs this: And of all the knowledge I have hitherto ſpoke of, I ſay, men are ſo far from being in danger for the lack of a *curious*, *Dogmatick*, *verboſe*,

or

or *pragmatical* knowledge, that I pray God the generality of people be not *deſtroyed* by its *ſuper-abundance.*

To come then to a *poſitive* ſatisfaction to the enquiry in hand; which I moſt paſſionately beſeech all to attend unto without prejudice, my deſign (God knows it) being only to *undeceive* all I can, to *expoſe* none.

The knowledge for lack of which people at preſent are deſtroyed, is *a ſober information* of Conſcience touching matters of *Faith* and *Practice*, neceſſary to their real happineſs: What thoſe matters are univerſally to *all* men, it is not *eaſie*, haply not *poſſible* preciſely to determine; by reaſon of the *variety* of mens conditions, and the anſwerable expectation of Juſtice, according to that moſt equitable rule, (*Luke* 12. 48.) *Unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall much be required.* Certainly *leſs* than this can be required of no man of *ordinary* reaſon and condition.

Firſt, That he underſtand his *happineſs* conſiſts not in any of thoſe lower enjoyments, but that as his Soul is an intelligent and immortal being, ſo it can never be ſatisfied but with that which hath within it, what ſuits and may perfect all its powers, and ſhall be eternal as it ſelf, of which Nature is nothing here below. Only *Virtue* here adminiſters any thing of real and durable *content.* And if *perfect Virtue* could be attained, and we eternally ſecured therein, free from all moleſtation and trouble conſequent upon

upon former guilt, thence must needs result a *full content* and complacence, as to any thing from *within* the mans self. And as to what *without* him his Soul could further covet, it being supposed that in *God* infinitely dwells all good, and that *Heaven* gives us the sight and *enjoyment* of him, it cannot be but a person so qualified as before, being received into Heaven, is compleatly happy, or as blessed as he can be. Now to *secure* us in perfect Virtue and such its result, to acquit us from our Vices, and possess us eternally of Heaven and the sight of God, there is no probable (at least no safe) way but what *Christianity* propounds.

Upon this, *Secondly*, follows the necessity of *Faith* in Christ Jesus, or an expectation of remission of sins and such compleat happiness through him, upon the performance of the *conditions* he requires. Of which conditions the *summe* is, that we believe and honestly receive whatsoever was delivered or published by him, when it is sufficiently declared unto us that it was by him delivered. So that it is evident, that though for the *general*, Faith in Christ be the *same* to all men, that is to say, that all men are bound to receive whatever they are reasonably satisfied to have been deliver'd by Christ, (and therefore generally to be Virtuous;) yet to *particular* persons it may be *different*, according to the particular degrees of *light* that every one hath enjoyed, that is, according to the evidence or means of satisfaction he hath had, and the capableness of his mind to admit

admit ſuch evidence: ſo that in fine, that particular may be a point of Faith, and ſo of Duty to one man, which to another by reaſon of his ignorance or other impediment is not ſuch. In the mean while this cannot but be indubitably evident to *all* men, who have ſo much as well *heard* of the *Goſpel*, that it requireth all men every where to *repent*, *Acts* 17. 30.

That therefore, *Thirdly*, muſt be concluded, that *Repentance from dead works* is a matter of ſuch indiſpenſible neceſſity to the happineſs of every man, that whoſo is not duly informed in the nature of it, may be *deſtroyed for lack of knowledge*. And by ſuch Repentance we are not to underſtand ſome tranſient diſpleaſure with our ſelves for ſome actions of ours, which we apprehend to have been imprudently or incommodiouſly done, nor meerly a ſorrow for all our paſt ſins as well known as unknown; But beſides this, (*firſt*) a conſiderate and *ſtedfaſt purpoſe* or reſolvedneſs to forſake ſin, and approve a mans ſelf impartially holy, which is a *change of mind*; and, (*ſecondly*) an *honeſt endeavour* according to that reſolvedneſs, which is a *change of life*. Acts of *Contrition*, *Confeſſion*, and mourning over ſin, are more truly *ſteps* and preparatives to *Repentance*, by which as by a proper cauſe this purpoſe comes to be rooted and ſetled in the mans mind, than Repentance it ſelf; which, I ſay, if we will ſpeak of as it is acceptable to God, and available to our ſalvation, we muſt determine to be ſuch a permanent habit as

already

already declared, a *new ſtate*, a durable courſe of Reformation, not an act of ſorrow, or a pang of devotion, or an amendment for a day or two. And it is much to be feared, that the want of the knowledge of this the true nature of Repentance, occaſioned by ſome inſufficient Teachers miſtaking, and ſo miſ-repreſenting its notion, has deſtroyed many, and to this day retains the ſame miſchievous and damning influence.

And, *laſtly*, becauſe we have determined him only to be the true penitent, who thus is, and remains a changed man, that is to ſay, Virtuous according to his reſolves, therefore moſt neceſſary to ſalvation muſt be the *knowledge* of *particular Virtues*, what thoſe Moral Duties are which are required of us, and what thoſe *ſins* which under the pain of eternal wrath we are to avoid. Namely, that to *God*, beſides the *outward worſhip* of Prayer, Sacraments, and attending his Word, we owe a *devout* and pious *temper* of Soul, conſiſting in a ſweet combination of *Faith, Hope, Love, Humility, Fear*, and what Graces elſe of the like nature: to Men, if *Governours, Honour, Obedience*, and *Loyal* adhæſion as need ſhall require. He's no good Chriſtian who would not venture his Life and Fortunes, if called thereto, in defence of his rightfull Soveraign. Again, to men if *ſimply Superiors*, and having nothing of obligation upon us, but what the eminency of their condition gives them, yet even to theſe reſpectively according to their degree, *Honour* and *Reverence*. To *Equals*, due

due *valuation* of them, and modest *præference*: to *Inferiors*, *courteſie* and condeſcention as need requires: to *all*, *juſtice*, *charity*, and *good will*, as well in words and actions as in thought. And, lastly, to our *ſelves*, a *care* and *reverence* ſuiting our nature and condition, in not betraying our reaſon, our health, our honour, our eſtate, by any intemperate, vile or pittiful practices. I do not ſay that every private Chriſtian muſt be an exquiſite Caſuiſt, or able to cleave an hair in determining the right of matters in every perplexed caſe: Herein they have Spiritual Guides appointed them by God, whom they are to conſult. But ſurely as to the *ordinary caſes* of life, of common concernment to all men, each perſon ought to wear knowledge enough about him, to determine what is his *duty*, what his *ſin*, or he is in great danger of being *deſtroyed for lack of knowledge*.

Of theſe points then, the *true happineſs* of man, and (the means thereto) *Faith* in Jeſus Chriſt, and *Repentance* from dead works, and to that purpoſe the *nature* of particular *Virtues*, we have ſaid it is neceſſary the Conſcience be ſoberly informed, or that in default thereof, men are in all likelihood of *periſhing for lack of knowledge*.

Now what we mean by *due information* of *Conſcience*, will appear beſt by conſidering the nature of Conſcience it ſelf, which in truth is but another name for the Underſtanding, conſidered in a particular regard. At leaſt as the mind of man takes in

or conceives the natures and notions of things, and generally in ... judgeth of them; we call it the *Understanding*: As it is furnished with certain principles and rules, by which as by its next and most intimate guide the mans practice is directed, we call it *Conscience*. Now that any thing may become a *principle* of Conscience, and so be of force to sway a man in his practice, it is necessary that the Proposition, which is supposed a Principle, be not only *understood* but *believed*, more or less, according as more strongly or faintly it sways the man. So that for a mans Conscience to be duly informed touching these matters, is not only for him speculatively to comprehend the meaning of such Propositions as these, God is the chief good and happiness of man, Faith, Repentance, and Virtue, are the means to attain the enjoyment of this God, but to be deeply in his heart convinced and perswaded of the verity of these things, and his concernment as to them.

If therefore any person amongst us, of common reason and capacity, be *ignorant* wherein true happiness doth consist, what the true nature of Faith in Christ, Repentance, of Devotion, Justice, Charity, Temperance, and Chastity is, or further, *want* the *knowledge* of such things as are *sufficient to perswade* him of the truth and necessity of these points, I say, that such person dying thus ignorant, in all likelihood perisheth for *lack of knowledge*.

But

But when I say thus, I would be understood to speak only of such whom providence hath blessed with the good tidings of the Gospel of Peace, and abilities in a good measure to comprehend its Doctrine: That, of the *Heathen* World, and of *Naturals*, to whom less hath been given, less will be required, I suppose it becometh not me to doubt. He amongst such, who *believeth* God to *be*, and to *be a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, if he shall so *seek* him, and yet believe little or nothing more. because by seeking he can find no more, may, for ought I know, sit above them in Heaven, who for want of unbyass'd *reason* and *charity*, as well to Almighty God, as the poor virtuous Ethnick, or weak headed Innocent, judge the *men* so bad, as to be unfit for Heaven; or *God* so ill natur'd, that is the infinitely good, so merciless a Tyrant, as to exclude men from happiness, for what he designedly left them under an utter disability to redress.

And now we are thus far up the hill, and can take a prospect of the *destructive ignorance*, let us stand still a while and look back, and see if we have not a reason to take up a *lamentation*, that blackness enfolds large tracts, and *multitudes* perish *for lack of knowledge*.

Meekly and without an affront to the knowledge of the age, *First*, as to that knowledge which consists in a *sober* and distinct *understanding* Divine *Truths*, even such as are *necessary*, are not the generality much to seek? It hath not been the business of

many Teachers to inſtruct, but amuſe people in Religion. We have been many of us bred up with Seraphick diſcourſes of the *in-dwelling* of the *Spirit*, and of *wonder-working Grace*, and of the *Elect* of God from *before the foundation of the World*; with *endleſs* and impertinent (many times moſt *ſeditious* and lying) catalogues of the *ſigns of the Grace* of God in his people: With the *glympſes of Chriſt*, and how *Believers* are made *partakers* of the Divine Nature, whether the *eſſence* of it be in us, or only its *effects*, (which laſt was too ſober a truth for the age:) How each *Believer* ought to ſeek after a *diſtinct communion* with *each perſon* of the Trinity by himſelf; with a multitude of ſuch *myſterious whimſies*, out of which, as I ſaid, the wit and reaſon of man cannot pick ſober ſence or truth. Hence it came to paſs, that every amuſed or *affrighted* and thunder-ſtruck perſon, finding within his breaſt a *change* which he knew not what to make of, in truth a *tumult* of *affections* much like (what they lead unto) a *phrenſie*, (ſometimes *wonder*, anon *fear*, then *hope*, then *joy*) every ſuch perſon, I ſay, thought himſelf a *Convert*, and began to talk of his *experience*. And this was the *work of Grace* and *Converſion*. Then every one, who could perſwade himſelf God had a favour from ever for him, and not for another, had the *Faith* of *Gods Elect*, and this was *Believing*. Every *good-meaning Woman*, who by ſympathizing with groans and whynings which ſhe heard from the Pulpit, put finger into the eye and *cryed*, was a *broken-hearted perſon*,

perſon, and this was *Repentance*. And in every company without fear or wit to *talk* of *Sermons*, and *Gods people*, and to look *demurely*, was to be *a gracious* and *precious* perſon. And this was *Virtue* and *Godlineſs*. And, alas! theſe miſtakes are ſo deeply rooted in the hearts of many of the common people, of *honeſt good-meaning*, that we who would redreſs them, coming upon this ſad diſadvantage, that we are to put people out of conceit with themſelves, and what they have a long time pleaſed themſelves in, as in a Fools Paradiſe, are by many ſuch honeſt abuſed perſons diſreliſh'd, reviled, cryed out on as *Carnal Preachers*, no whit ſpiritualized; nor can it yet (God knows when it will) be effected, that the *Religion* of the *multitude* be much more than a confident, preſumptuous and irrational *humour*, than which there being nothing more contrary to ſober knowledge, alas! people *periſh for lack of knowledge*.

And, *Secondly*, as to *Divine knowledge*, as *oppoſed* to *Scepticiſme* in Religion, and as it ſignifies the ſeeing the evidence of Religious Principles, which perſwades us ſolidly of their truth, is not the complaint as juſt and ſad as of the former branch, multitudes periſh for lack of it? As generally, *juſtifying Faith*, amongſt people, is nothing but a truſt or *confidence of Gods favour* in Chriſt, ſo, with the moſt part, the *Faith of Principles* is little more than *Opinion*, inſomuch that not only the *Articles* of our *Creed*, that is, the chief points of Chriſtian Religion, but even

even the common principles of *all Religion*, the ſtanding boundaries of good and evil, are *doubted*, queſtion'd and impugned, and by reaſon of the multitude of *Diſputants*, we can ſcarce find *Believers*. Of this, had experience being an irrefragable proof, is there not reaſon to take it up for a *lamentation*, Alas! for it is *a day of darkneſs and of glo minesſ, a day of clouds and thick darkneſs ſpread upon the face* not of the *valleys* only, but of the *mountains*? The *ignorance* (or which is much the ſame, *miſtake*) of theſe plain *neceſſaries* in Religion, the not-ſeeing, or (which is but a willful blindneſs) not-attending to the evidences which would perſwade men touching them, *deſtroys* many not only of the *inferiour* Commonalty, but *higher* Perſonages.

But we have poſſibly dwelt too long on the view of this ungratefull ſubject, the common *deſtructive crime* and woe: and time it were to conſult its *remedy*, were it not proper and naturally conducing thereunto, firſt to inſpect its *Cauſes*, which was the ſecond thing propounded.

The *Firſt* of which I take to be, the *making* ſo *many* things *neceſſary* to Chriſtianity, which indeed are not: for from hence it comes to paſs, that moſt men being not able to give their whole time to Religion, and commonly allowing to it only ſome odd parts of their vacancy and leiſure, can never penetrate and digeſt the ſo manifold points and members of its enlarged body. And then in ſo great a *Wilderneſs* of pretended neceſſaries, not being able

to

to *discern* what are *principally* (and it may be truly and solely) *necessary*, they stick upon the most popular and commonly ventilated points, and totally or for the most part neglect what to them is of greater concernment. Verily, were *Christianity* such an *infinite thing* as some seem to have made it, it is not most mens *lives*, (considering they must follow common Callings) that were sufficient for them to attain unto a mean knowledge therein.

Amongst those things made necessary to Christianity, which are not, I shall instance only in two heads; Various *Doctrines*, and Various *Gifts*.

As to the first, It is scarce a moderate *Volume* which will contain a *Confession of Faith*, as some of our Faith-menders have enlarged it. And yet we have all heard of more Holy and Orthodox times, when *Twelve Articles* comprised its summe. If we would have more, we have a *Catechism*, which *first* acquaints us with our Baptismal Vow, or the Covenant every of us made or ought to keep with God; then, briefly, explains the Creed, the Lords Prayer, and Decalogue, things we are concerned to know by the particular branches of that forenamed Vow or Covenant. And then, lastly, adds what is further necessary to be known and observed by us, as to the Seals of that Covenant. This was thought *enough* by our Church for *common* men to know, in order to the making them Christians, and possibly was more than what the Primitive Church for two or three hundred years thought necessary too.

What

What will ſome ſay? will you then have our *Bibles* taken from us? By no means: for theſe will teach you the ſame things in different forms, and beſides convince you of their truth, and otherwiſe affect you with them. But when plain perſons meet with *hard places* in their Bibles, not relating to theſe neceſſaries, I would have them paſs ſuch difficulties over, and not interpret them on their own heads, without a due Teacher, but content themſelves commonly to know, to believe, be affected with, and practiſe theſe neceſſary points thus ſummarily compriſed by our Church. And the truth is, ſince the people have had more knowledge than this, it hath made them (what it was objected to St. *Paul* his Learning had him) mad: I ſhould have ſaid, ſince they have had more, they have had leſs; for they have neglected a great deal of this, which was more neceſſary than what ſucceeded in its room.

And yet how little a part is this, according to ſome, of the neceſſary Chriſtianity for the people? Not a word here of the *eternal Decrees* of God, according to ſome the great and neceſſary foundation of our happineſs. The reaſon poſſibly was, becauſe our Church thought it enough, as ſhe explains that part of the Creed, to believe the holy *Catholick Church* was the *Elect people* of God, or Gods choice people; but of thoſe without, ſhe thought the people ought to judge, no more than what ſhe ſaith, and that is nothing. Again, not a word here of

of the *holy Diſcipline*, and what *form*, or if any, ſtrictly inſtituted by God; which if it were not neceſſary to the peoples common Chriſtianity, ſome men abominably did, and ſtill do abuſe the World, who preach to them little elſe or more vehemently than invectives againſt Biſhops and Epiſcopacy. The reaſon why our Church paſs'd this point over ſo lightly, may be preſumed becauſe ſhe found a form of Government ſetled in the Catholick Church, which could pretend to more of a Divine Right than any elſe could be produced. And therefore what was enough for people to know, was what ſhe ſayes, that we ſhould *ſubmit our ſelves to all our Governours*, Teachers, Spiritual Paſtors and Maſters. And of this point of Government, while they would know more, we ſee they unlearn thus much, they grow *forgetful of this neceſſary*. I may not inſiſt on more inſtances: by theſe it is evident, the too much *enlarging* of *Chriſtian* Doctrine, produceth the *want* of *knowledge* which we complain of.

Again, there are *various Gifts* made very much neceſſary to Chriſtianity, or as they ſpeak to a gracious heart, which being not ſo neceſſary produce the like effect, though people at firſt do not perceive it. I ſhall inſtance only in what they call the *Gift of Prayer*, which ſome can ſcarce think any perſon who hath received true Grace, in ſome meaſure at leaſt to want. A thing ſo far from being neceſſary to every private mans Chriſtianity, that in truth it can ſcarce be ſaid to have any pro-

per and distinct nature at all. For if we will understand any thing of sense thereby, its import is, a gift or *faculty* of *utterance* in the particular case or office of Prayer; and so consists in a *readiness* of *invention*, and *volubility* of speech: which whoso has, and useth as much to other purposes, suppose to Preaching, as to Praying, would be equally expert at both, that is to say, have as good a gift of *Preaching* as of *Praying*. So that both being materially one and the same, *viz.* a faculty of ready uttering what a man hath conceived, if there could be any such distinct thing as the gift of Prayer, that gift of Prayer would be no more necessary to any one to make him a Christian, than it would be to every Christian that he have the gift of Preaching, because I say the nature of both is *one* and the same. I cannot now digress to vindicate particular Texts, which giddy heads have detorted to assert this matter; but I only say, and appeal for truth thereof to sad experience, that since private persons, as thinking it necessary to their Christianity, have made it their great business to make their Prayers as fast as they say them, they have pickt up *words* and *phrases*, and forgot and neglected necessary things; they have been confounded with their own dreams and rambles, and mistaken commotions of wild *fancy* and *affection*, for the solid *joys*, and Christian comfort, which only arise from the testimony of a good Conscience, that is, from a reflexion on a virtuous life. In short,

ſhort, as men ought not to be *idle*, and neglect the improving of their underſtanding in ſearching into commonly reputed truths, or raiſing their other faculties of utterance in whatever caſes may benefit themſelves or others, ſo ought all firſt to make *ſure* of ſuch *neceſſaries* as before ſpoken of, leſt while they ſpend their time on what they might have ſpared, they periſh for the lack of knowledge of what ſurely would have made them happy.

A *ſecond* original of this deſtructive ignorance amongſt us, I conceive to be the *miſtaking* the nature of *ſincerity*, or what it is heartily to be a Chriſtian or Convert. Many poor honeſt-minded perſons, have ſuppos'd it to be little elſe, than to be *zealouſly* addicted to that *Party* or Faction, which of all others they judged *pureſt*. You'l ſay, ſuch were ſilly, or Fools: And who can help it, if many have been made ſuch? Let their Seducers anſwer for that. Again, Others, of more ſobriety and good meaning, have thought ſincerity to be nothing elſe but the *motion* of good *affections* in holy Exerciſes: When they have pray'd or heard with ſome *concernedneſs* under each part of the office, their breaſts relenting, and as it were thawing from their antient ſenceleſneſs, by reaſon of a more attentive temper at ſuch times than others, they have thought this to be indubitable ſincerity: Not conſidering that even a *Romance*, a well contriv'd and well *acted Play*, in an attentive Auditor, ſhall beget like *concernments* of grief, hope, commiſeration, joy, &c.

And having run away with this miſtake, whatever it was, which they remembred to have raiſed their affections, and begot in them ſuch inward titillations of griefs, hopes or joys, this they conceived they ought to make it their whole buſineſs to follow. And becauſe *Novelty* had this effect, eſpecially if ſet up (as was the cuſtom) with ſome *Mimick geſtures* and *tones*, therefore they could hear Sermons and long-winded Prayers all their days. Nor were they concerned either to underſtand or remember them, much leſs to practice them. It was enough if they were *moved* and wrought upon by the preſent hearing of them, though they came back again no whit the wiſer, nor a jot more reſolved on any particular Duty, or againſt ſin. I am far from cenſuring all late Non-Conformiſts of this weakneſs: but the event ſhews it to have been good in many, who will ſay they have wondrouſly profited by ſuch a Sermon, of which they are not able to tell you two words. The poor people do not *diſſemble*, but are *deceived*: They mean their affections were tickled and ſtirred by it. Hence it is apparent, ſuch perſons neſtle themſelves up in ignorance: and whereas *ſincerity* lies in an *heart ſoberly changed*, and a *virtuous life* flowing from thence, this they overlook, and ſeeing not, run on without it, till many times they periſh for lack of knowledge.

A *third* thing, which becauſe it will be eaſily underſtood a cauſe of this miſchief, we need but touch upon,

upon, is ſome mens *pride* and ſelf conceit. As they are confident they are Saints and ſhall be ſaved, whereas the reprobate World they are ſure ſhall periſh, ſo have they the ſame good confidence that they have Saving knowledge, and a more Spiritual notion of Divine Truths than other people, who cannot but be carnal, becauſe they talk ſo much of reaſon, and endeavour both to apprehend and teach Chriſtianity, ſo as to make ſenſe of it, and give a reaſon for it: And what marvel if ſuch who are ignorant or miſtaken, and will not learn, periſh by a deſtructive ignorance?

A *fourth* evil, which will be eaſily apprehended to be of the ſame malign influence, is the *admiration* of ſome mens *perſons*. There have been men whoſe buſineſs it has been to make themſelves *popular*, to the end they might have power to overturn what they did not like. Theſe have ſcrewed themſelves into a good eſteem among common people, by crying out againſt the evils of the Times, the crimes of Great ones and Governours, (things which people are always greedy to hear of) and by an oſtentation of thoſe parts, which they had in an odd way from other men, have gained the repute of wiſe, and able, and holy: which advantage when they were ſenſible they had got, they then lead the people whither they pleaſed, as they ſaw themſelves able. And having brought a multitude to this paſs, that they would hear none but them, the poor people knew little more than what they would let them know,

know, and thoſe were moſtly ſuch curioſities and whimſies as ſpoken of, which did confound, not edifie unto ſalvation.

A *fifth* original of this lack of ſober knowledge, is a *barbarous conſtancy* to mens own *Opinions*, though too *raſhly* by them taken up. The moſt men cannot endure to have been miſtaken: and when they ſee their error, confeſs it not to be ſuch, but endeavour to make it probable, till they have even cheated themſelves and believe their own deluſion. And then beſides that theſe opinions, and the defence of them, take up the time and thought, which ſober knowledge ought to do, Errors hanging as in a ſtring, and one part drawing on the other, they cannot believe, at leaſt not maintain one, but they muſt admit more. And ſo in fine the ſober knowledge becomes partly adulterated, partly neglected and oppreſs'd, and men periſh through deſtructive ignorance.

The *laſt* of theſe banefull miſchiefs which I ſhall preſent, is the *holding the truth in unrighteouſneſs*. Men ſometimes are not ignorant, and yet become ſo. They do know Truth, and their Duty, but they have no mind ſuch things ſhould be Truths, becauſe then ſuch and ſuch points muſt be Duty. They *ſtudy* therefore what *uncertainty* they can find in thoſe ungrateful Truths, and after long ſearch, ſometimes think they have found a knot in the Bulruſh. They then *doubt* what before they ſaw evidence to believe: after proceed to *impugn*, and

in

in the end totally *diſ-believe*. By this means come multitudes to periſh for want of ſuch a knowledge, which acquieſces in the due evidence of Truths.

But what redreſs can be found for this deſtructive want of ſober Divine knowledge?

The *remedies* are either *publick* or *private*. I begin with the private, which I commend to every mans Conſcience in the fear of God, as by a ſtrict ſcrutiny thereof he finds himſelf more or leſs to ſeek, either in underſtanding the notions, or ſeeking the evidence of Divine Truths.

The *firſt* will be, to *reſolve* upon a ſpirit of *meekneſs* and *ſubmiſſion* to the *Church*, and thoſe which are by her ſent, as able to inſtruct them in the Lord. It is beyond all controverſie, and confeſs'd by our Adverſaries, that all thoſe things which are *neceſſary* to our ſalvation, are certainly *determined* by our Church. As to thoſe things which are more uncertain and indifferent, and ſo apt to ingenerate ſcruples, no man of *modeſty* or good manners but muſt ſay, they are likely to be beſt determined by Superiors. And it is undoubted, that our Lord appointed Governors and Paſtors in his Church, and that when he promiſed to be with them unto the end of the world, he aſſur'd us too they ſhould continue to the end of the world. And when that command (and the like) was given, *Obey them that have the rule over you in the Lord, and ſubmit your ſelves*, it was intended to oblige unto the end of the

the world: wherefore I see not how men can doubt but that they are indispensible bound by the Law of God to what I advise. And one would think what I advise is so reasonable, that it should easily take. For what is it in effect, but to desire common people to have the *charity* and *civility* to their *Kings* and *Parliaments*, and those Reverend *Convocation*, which have laboured in the modelling the Doctrine and Orders of our Church, according to Primitive patterns, to believe them neither to have been *Knaves* nor *Fools*: to have understood better than a company of pragmatical Novellists, (many of whom scarce ever read over three good Books in their lives, besides the Bible) what was Christian, and Primitive, and necessary: and then not to have gone about to abuse their power and trust, by proceeding contrary to their knowledge, to ruine their own souls and other mens. Truly I cannot see how any common private person can adhere to his own Judgment, against this the publick Judgment of his Governors, but he must think the one of these of them, at least that they are such comparatively in respect of himself. Wherefore in short, let us be content to *learn* Christianity, as to its necessary part, from our Church, which in the Catechism, Prayer-Book and Homilies, all even the darkest places have opportunities to do, and in most places, God be blessed, other plentiful advantages besides. And as to us who are *Ministers*, let us carefully *teach* according to this form of Doctrine, lest we come to

have

have charged upon us not only Error and Schiſm, but alſo Apoſtacy, if not Perjury. This will be one more private remedy of the want of neceſſary knowledge.

A *ſecond* will be, that people would endeavour, when converſant in the publick worſhip of God, to *hear with underſtanding*: I mean, would not only *attend* unto the *words* and forms of ſpeech which they hear, but to the *things*, and endeavour to carry them with them treaſured up in faithful minds. It's poſſible every plain man underſtands not every word, or if he did, could not remember the hundredth part: yet the drift, ſcope and common ſubject of all, repreſented in ſo various forms, few attentive perſons can miſs. As for inſtance: ſuppoſe me to have heard a diſcourſe of Repentance; poſſible all the preparatives to it, and particular rules in its practice, I may not ſo diſtinctly conceive or retain: but thus much, that without Repentance no forgiveneſs of ſin is to be had, and that every ſorrow for ſin is not Repentance, but it muſt be a durable Reformation which only will paſs with God; this I may eaſily retain. And ſo much as this ſhould a perſon definent in ſober knowledge learn by each Sermon, truly he would not be long in danger of periſhing by any deſtructive ignorance.

Thirdly, Let each perſon conſcientiouſly cleave

unto, and *practice* what he underſtands, and hath ſufficient evidence to perſwade him is his concernment. What we have above ſaid of Errors, is no leſs certain of all Chriſtian Truths and Duties; they have a moſt neceſſary connexion, and one will draw in another. He that adheres to one Truth, will by force and conſequence of that be lead into more. He that practiſeth righteouſneſs in his common dealings with man, will at length ſee he muſt give *Cæſar* the things that are *Cæſars*, as well as pay *John* and *Thomas* the money he owes them; that is, be a Loyal as well as an Honeſt man. Beſides, ſuch may expect the bleſſing and influence of Heaven to ſuccour their weakneſs: for *the ſecret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will ſhew them his Covenant.*

Laſtly, Let ſuch an one *beware* of all thoſe *forerecited* evils, which induce an ignorance of plain neceſſaries. Let him be content his Faith be no larger than the Churches. Let him place ſincerity in an honeſt heart, and conſcientious practice. Let him beware of pride, ſelf-conceit, and being led by the noſe by men diſſenting from publick determinations, and of popular and moving humour. Let him never be aſhamed to acknowledge and renounce his error, or to amend his fault, and in nothing let him live againſt the ſolid rational dictates of his Conſcience. Solid rational

rational dictates, I ſaid, for in matters of plain neceſſity, Conſcience will quickly be reſolved: and in ſcruples touching leſſer matters, I am of the mind clearly, without any other difficult rules, every common man ought to *ſubmit* his Judgment to his *Spiritual Guides*, and they theirs to the *determination* of the *Church*; and that is a ſhort iſſue, and we may quickly live ſober, honeſt, and in peace; and I think then we are *wiſe* enough *unto ſalvation*, that is, paſt the danger of being *deſtroyed for lack of knowledge*.

It remains I ſhould now ſpeak to the *publick* remedies: but theſe, according to the purport of my former Doctrine, I *leave* to my *Superiors*, whom they concern, and whom I pretend not to inſtruct, as being always reſolved, according to my Duty, to believe them wiſer than my ſelf, and better to underſtand the redreſs of publick evils. I will therefore briefly conclude the whole, in an earneſt *addreſs* to perſons of all conditions, that they will each *endeavour* by the moſt proper means they have heard, or can deviſe, to ſecure to themſelves, and propagate amongſt others, this *practical knowledge*, a knowledge which may make them and the World more pure, more peaceable, full of all good works, without partiality and without hypocriſie.

My Brethren, we all of us profeſs to be Chriſtians, that is, perſons who believe our ſelves to

have here *no abiding place*, but to *ſeek one to come, a City which has foundations whoſe builder and maker is God*; this World therefore to be a place which we muſt only paſs through, but yet that we ought ſo to demean our ſelves in our paſſage, as to ſecure a bliſsful reception at our journeys end: If this be our belief, as it is our pretence, there can be but *two* things, as to our Souls, of concernment to us: the firſt, *to know* what may make us virtuous; the ſecond, to *be virtuous* in purſuance of what we know. It is the firſt of theſe which my whole diſcourſe hath driven at, yet ſo that in all likelihood, that attain'd will ſecure the latter.

And I beſeech you give me leave a little to expoſtulate the caſe: What have theſe glorious, theſe Heaven-born Souls of ours deſerved of us, that they ſhould be made ſlaves and vaſſals to what is baſe or mean? that they ſhould be rais'd and imployed to no better offices, than to underſtand how to *eat* and *drink* well, or how to amaſs *thick clay*, or get money, it may be to *put it into a bag with holes*? Or if we think knowledge an acquiſt more worthy of them, why then ſhould they be airy and trivial notions only which we will purſue? Why not this *knowledge* which is both of preſent and eternal *uſe* and *excellence*; which will transform us into the Divine likeneſs here in Virtue, and hereafter in Glory.

Sure

Sure it is, we cannot but approve this kind of knowledge as *fitteſt* for us, and of all moſt *honouralle*, and which may moſt truly denominate us knowing. For all wiſe men judge him to be the moſt Learned, who underſtands not ſo much variety of things, as that one thing, which concerns him and which he profeſſes. Now as Chriſtians what concerns us more, or what profeſs we more than Holineſs?

Then, if we look to the effects of this knowledge, it is really moſt *Pleaſant*, as conducing to poſſeſs us of clean and quiet breaſts, the *greateſt* pleaſure on earth, and much the moſt *noble*.

Again, we cannot be unſenſible of thoſe moſt effectual means and *advantages*, which we have hereto, if we will not be wanting to our ſelves; God having *revealed* the Doctrine hereof from Heaven, and that by his Son ſent into the world to *enlighten every man*.

As we would not then be deſtroyed everlaſtingly, by our own ſelves too, and that moſt inexcuſably, let us *meditate* in theſe things *day and night*; Let the *knowledge of the Holy*, the rule of Virtue, and articles and evidences of Faith, which are all ſo many incentives to the moſt ſtrictly virtuous life, be our greateſt ſtudy. We ſhall thus ſurely eſcape this danger of periſhing for *lack of knowledge*: and then there can be but one

danger

danger only remaining, and that is of periſhing for lack of *practice*; which too certainly we ſhall eſcape, if we ſuffer ſuch knowledge to have its perfect work upon us.

Which that we may do, the Lord grant us his grace, and by that bring us to glory, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord: To whom, &c.

FINIS.

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